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ABSTRACT

A performance curriculum communicates with students, teachers, administrators, counselors, and taxpayers. Its heart is a series of statements which explain in observable terms what the teacher will accept as evidence that what is to be learned has been learned. Such statements allow: true teacher-pupil understanding; individually diagnosed and prescribed instruction; limited credit offerings and course challenges; continuous-progress curriculum; public accountability; flexibility; teacher-designed staffing patterns; and criterion-referenced assessment. If a child fails to achieve an objective, then either the objective or the prescription is inappropriate. This does not mean that the teacher has failed, but that a new prescription is needed. It is analogous to a physician who, when the first prescription fails to cure the patient, prescribes a new medicine. What teachers want to accomplish with their students is generally hidden from everyone; a performance curriculum would solve this problem and provide teachers with greater support to deal with children as individuals. Students should tell their teachers that they want to know what will be accepted as observable evidence that a learning task has been performed. This document includes a performance curriculum format which explains key terms involved in such a curriculum. (DC)

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A PERFORMANCE CURRICULUM AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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A performance curriculum is a communication device. It communicates with students: They become aware of what observable and/or measurable activity you will accept as evidence that they have learned what you want them to learn.

It communicates with your colleagues: You may now obtain some agreement as to what quantity of work is worth what amount of credit and what quality of work is worth what grade.

It communicates with administrators: They now know what it is specifically that you are trying to get students to do and can support criterion-referenced materials and media requisitions.

It communicates with counselors: Counseling can now relate specifically to pupil performance expectations and accomplishments.

It communicates with taxpayers: Now they too get the finger of accountability pointed their way. The taxpaying public becomes accountable to help supply what is necessary to achieve the objective, since the resources needed to correct pupil performance deficiencies can be better documented.

Through the use of a continuous-progress performance curriculum, terms such as diagnosis, prescription, individualized instruction, self-directed learning, and differentiated staffing take on real meaning. For instance, unless you have a sequence of pupil performances, you do not have a continuous-progress curriculum. Unless you are testing against a performance objective, learning outcome, or observable criteria of some sort, your diagnosis communicates to no one but you! Unless your prescription is based upon what you want the student to do compared against what he or she can do at the time of the pre-test, you really are giving out "mass-prescribed medicine" based upon what you prepared for the day regardless of pupil need. Unless you are willing to write lesson plans for students in second person rather than about them in third person and allow students free access to the lesson plans, you are not allowing self-directed learning to take place nor are you significantly individualizing your instruction. Unless you are using a curriculum based upon a sequence of pupil performance expectations, you might as well admit that you have lock-step, group-paced learning and quit trying new staffing patterns because there will be limited effective communication within any team.

Ever since the Quincy Grammar School in Massachusetts opened its doors, educators have been concerned about the nebulous term "curriculum." Thanks to the recent work of behavioral scientists, we have finally reached a meaningful use for this term that can and does communicate to all who will listen and/or read. The new title is "Performance Curriculum," the heart of which is a series of statements by the teacher which explain in observable terms what the

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teacher will accept as evidence that what is to be learned has been learned. Such statements provide the student, parent, and administrator with a communication about the curriculum that for the first time in the history of education, creates an avenue for the following to occur:

- o True understanding between all parties in a teacher-pupil contract.
- o Individually diagnosed and prescribed instruction.
- o Limited credit offerings and course challenges.
- o True continuous-progress through a sequenced curriculum.
- o Public accountability in terms of media and resource support.
- o Flexibility based upon individual needs.
- o Staffing patterns based upon teacher designed teams.
- o Criterion-referenced assessment rather than standardized norm-referenced tests.

If, in the implementation of a true performance curriculum with learning outcomes and pre- and post-tests that are criterion-referenced to the outcomes, the child fails to achieve an objective, then one of two things is wrong: either the objective is not correct for the child or the prescription (learning activity) is inappropriate. If you insist that the child made a mistake -- then it would still be obvious that there is a flaw in the diagnosis or prescription. Teachers are understandably afraid of this kind of language because it sounds like the old indictment, "If the student fails, the teacher has failed." But this is not necessarily what is being said here. The following analogy may help clarify this point.

When one visits a physician, that physician has a particular performance he expects from the patient which he will accept as evidence of good health. He might say, "Given a thermometer, you will register a temperature of 98.6 degrees." Then he places a "pre-test" under the tongue and compares the results of the pre-test with his objective. No one ever accuses the patient of making a mistake because he registers a temperature of 101 degrees. Instead, the physician reaches up on the shelf and prescribes an individual criterion-referenced activity; and in most cases, some self-testing advice is also given. At a later date, the physician uses that same self-testing device as a post-test to measure improvement. If he finds there is little improvement, he will not declare either himself or the patient a failure, but rather he will prescribe another learning activity (medicine) or a series of other tests to determine if the objective of a 98.6 degree temperature is a sound expectation for the patient. He may discover that the metabolism is such that he must alter his objective. In either case, either the objective or the prescription is altered.

Although schools may never have the patient-practitioner ratio that physicians enjoy nor the modern media to facilitate learning, they can have a curriculum that accommodates all concerned. As is often the case in hospitals and medical centers, noncertified personnel can be provided to assist with the instruction process.

One reason hospitals have considerable volunteer help is that they function on a performance curriculum. Almost all required activity in a hospital is observable and/or measurable. By the same reading, schools do not have volunteers that medical groups enjoy because what the teacher wants done with children is usually well formulated in the teacher's mind but hidden from others -- even the "patient." The answer to this problem is for schools to develop a performance curriculum which communicates with all concerned and allows, encourages, and provides teachers with a much greater degree of support to deal with children as individuals.

The following is a statement I would like to hear from a student addressing his or her teacher:

> "I appreciate your detailed description of what it is you want me to LEARN! But in order to ensure good communication between you and me, would you please tell me what you accept as OBSERVABLE EVIDENCE that I <u>have</u> learned <u>and</u> name the references (books, films, tapes, etc.) from which I can obtain the data, skills, information, etc., to prove that I have learned? You see, with this kind of information, I can:
>
> 1. Determine for myself if I am learning;
> 2. Feel confident as to the content of your tests;
> 3. Request an opportunity to challenge a part or all of a course;
> 4. Work ahead to speed my progress and accept learning tasks with less guidance from you;
> 5. Make up work I have missed by having missed a lecture or a discussion;
> 6. Feel certain that I know what I am getting into when I sign for up your course;
> 7. Talk in terms of specific performance expectations when I meet with a counselor; and finally,
> 8. Stand a much better chance of learning self-direction, which you have been trying to teach me since Kindergarten.
>
> Thank you for your continued efforts to help me help myself."

PERFORMANCE CURRICULUM TERMS AND FORMAT

The following is a format to be considered for building curriculum that communicates through outcomes and lends itself to continuous progress.

Subject:	Math, Science, Physical Education, etc.
Course Goals:	Non-observable, nebulous intent, non-measurable direction such as: Learn, know, understand, appreciate, and recognize.
Concept:	Idea, attitude, or skill to be learned, understood, appreciated, known, or "covered."
Purpose:	Rationale written to the student telling him in his own words why the concept is important for him to learn.
Objective:	What you want the student to do! What you will accept as evidence that he has learned what you want him to learn! Observable and/or measurable behavior, performance criteria or expectations. The parameters of the area to be mastered without giving away the specific test question. Terms such as: identify, select, point, tell, play,* list, find,* match, write, diagram, build, construct, create, combine, draw, develop, explain, extract, jump, locate, make, move, narrate, operate, pull, prove, place, put, recite, rearrange, discuss,* and acquire.
Pretest:	The specifics of the objective. Do it!
Learning Activities	What you are advising the student to do in order to perform the objective. Start each sentence off with a key non-behavioral term such as: listen, look, study, discuss, read, observe, view, practice, review, enjoy, imagine, play, watch, explore, prepare, figure, generate, and guess.
Quest:	For primary give much detail! For upper grades, no details! If the suggestion supports the concept, it is probably not quest.

*Best used as Learning Activities but may be appropriate for specific subjects such as: play in P.E., find in math, and discuss in forensics.

A list of references and supporting documents for these ideas is available from the author.